

CUMMER MUSEUM GARDENS  
829 Riverside Avenue  
Jacksonville  
Duval County  
Florida

HALS FL-6  
*FL-6*

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

### THE CUMMER MUSEUM GARDENS

HALS NO. FL-6

Location: 829 Riverside Avenue, Jacksonville, Duval County, Florida  
Lat: 30.315030 Long: -81.675993

Significance: Jacksonville's Cummer Museum gardens began in the early 1900s with the design of an English garden by Ossian Cole Simonds, one of the founders of the American Society of Landscape Architects. Almost three decades later, the garden footprint expanded to include an Italian garden by "Dean of American Women Landscape Architects" Ellen Biddle Shipman, and a garden to its north by William Lyman Phillips of the Olmsted firm. The involvement of these forerunners in the field of Landscape Architecture gives national importance to the gardens at The Cummer Museum.

History: Wellington W. Cummer, a Michigan lumber baron and a patriarch of a pioneer Jacksonville family, built a home with his wife Ada on the banks of the St. Johns River in 1902. His sons, Arthur and Waldo, and their wives, Ninah and Clara, respectively, moved into the parcels immediately north and south of their father the following year. Although the family's residences were demolished and replaced with the Cummer Museum, their extensive gardens remain for visitors to enjoy today.

The site is terraced, accommodating for its sloping topography, and divided along the east-west axis into three parallel, rectilinear rooms, so that each space contains a view of the water. The central space is an open, grassy expanse - essentially a "great lawn." To its south is the English garden, originally designed in 1903 by Ossian Cole Simonds of Chicago, and redesigned in 1910 by Thomas Meehan and Sons of Philadelphia. This garden's geometric layout is emphasized by axial brick paths, parterres, and a semicircular wisteria arbor. In 1925, a vibrant display of azaleas (a relatively uncommon landscape plant in Florida at the time) was added to bring color to the space, which is further complimented by several garden ornaments attributed to William Mercer, including a pair of cast concrete barrel chairs and the mosaic designs in the area's central water features.

Inspired by a visit to Villa Gamberaia, Arthur and Ninah Cummer hired Ellen Biddle Shipman to design a similar garden in 1931. Flanking the north side of the central lawn, Shipman's Italian garden includes the classic elements of its prototype in Florence: arches direct the visitor's gaze, reflecting pools bring the heavens earthward, and single rows of Italian cypress create both horizontal movement across the space and vertical movement skyward. The space is

symmetrical in its own right, and mirrors the axes established in Simond's English garden. Lions are featured throughout the Italian garden, appearing as individual statues, as spitters on a tiered marble fountain, and as feet on numerous benches.

William Lyman Phillips, commissioned by Waldo and Clara Cummer in tandem with Shipman, designed and reshaped the area just north of the Italian garden. Known as the "Olmsted" garden, Phillips' plan for this space integrated new plantings and structural elements with those already in existence. This space is currently undergoing restoration, and as such, is off-limits to visitors.

Sources: *Books*

*A Legacy in Bloom: Celebrating a Century of Gardens at The Cummer.* Judith B. Tankard. Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens. Jacksonville, FL. : 2008.

*A Tale of Two Gardens.* Sally Spangler Barnett. Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens. Jacksonville, FL.

*The Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens, Jacksonville, Florida.* Tanja Jones, Hope McMath, Aaron De Groft, Maarten van de Guchte. Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens. Jacksonville, FL. : The Museum, c2000.

*Articles*

Tankard, Judith B. "Splendor restored." *Horticulture, Gardening at its Best* 100.2 (March-April 2004): 50(6).

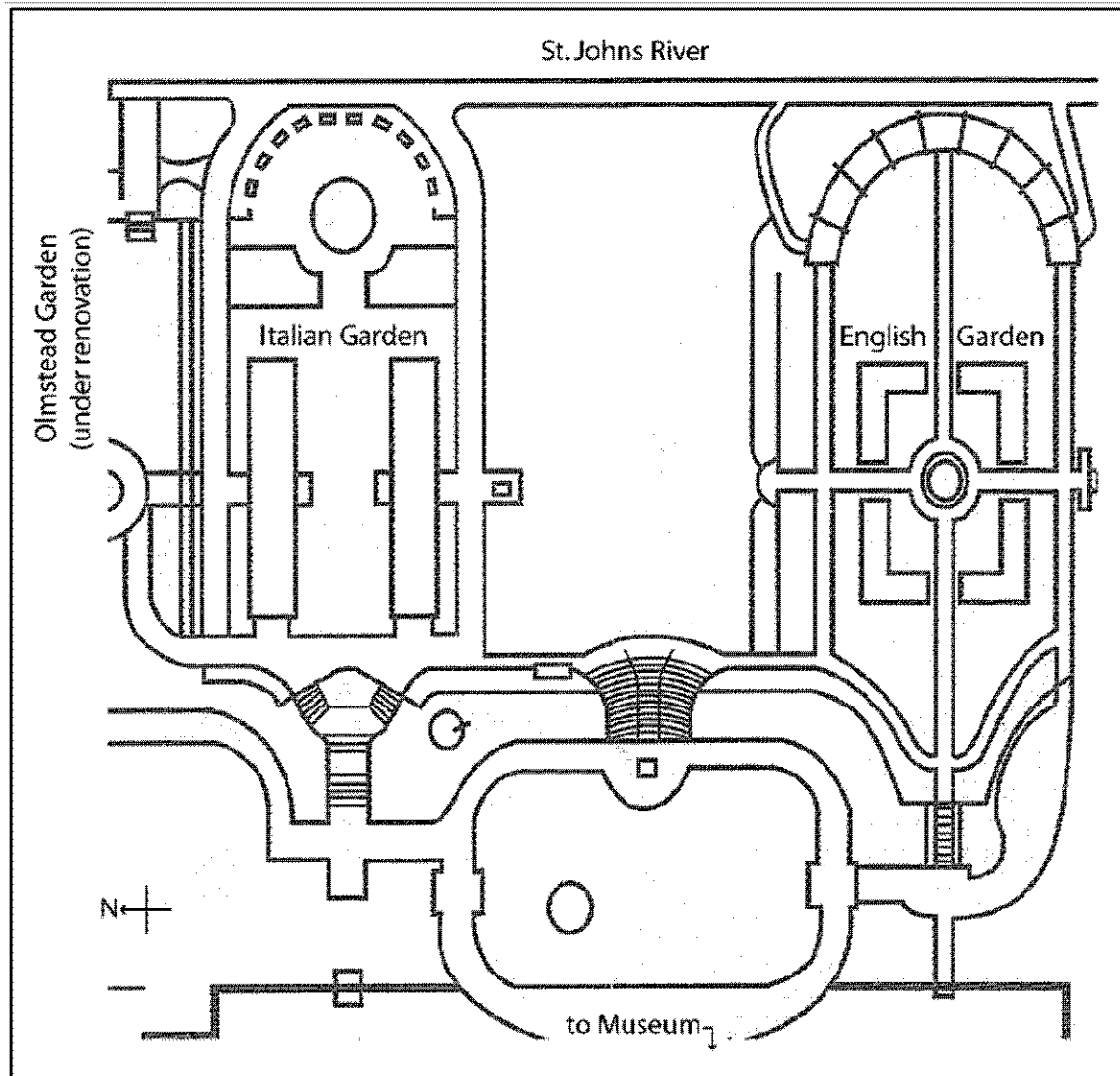
"Cummer Celebrates Restoration of Italian Garden." *Florida Trend* 43.3 (July 2000): 3.

Drake, Barbara. "An Artful Balance: The Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens." *Florida History & the Arts* (Winter 2002).

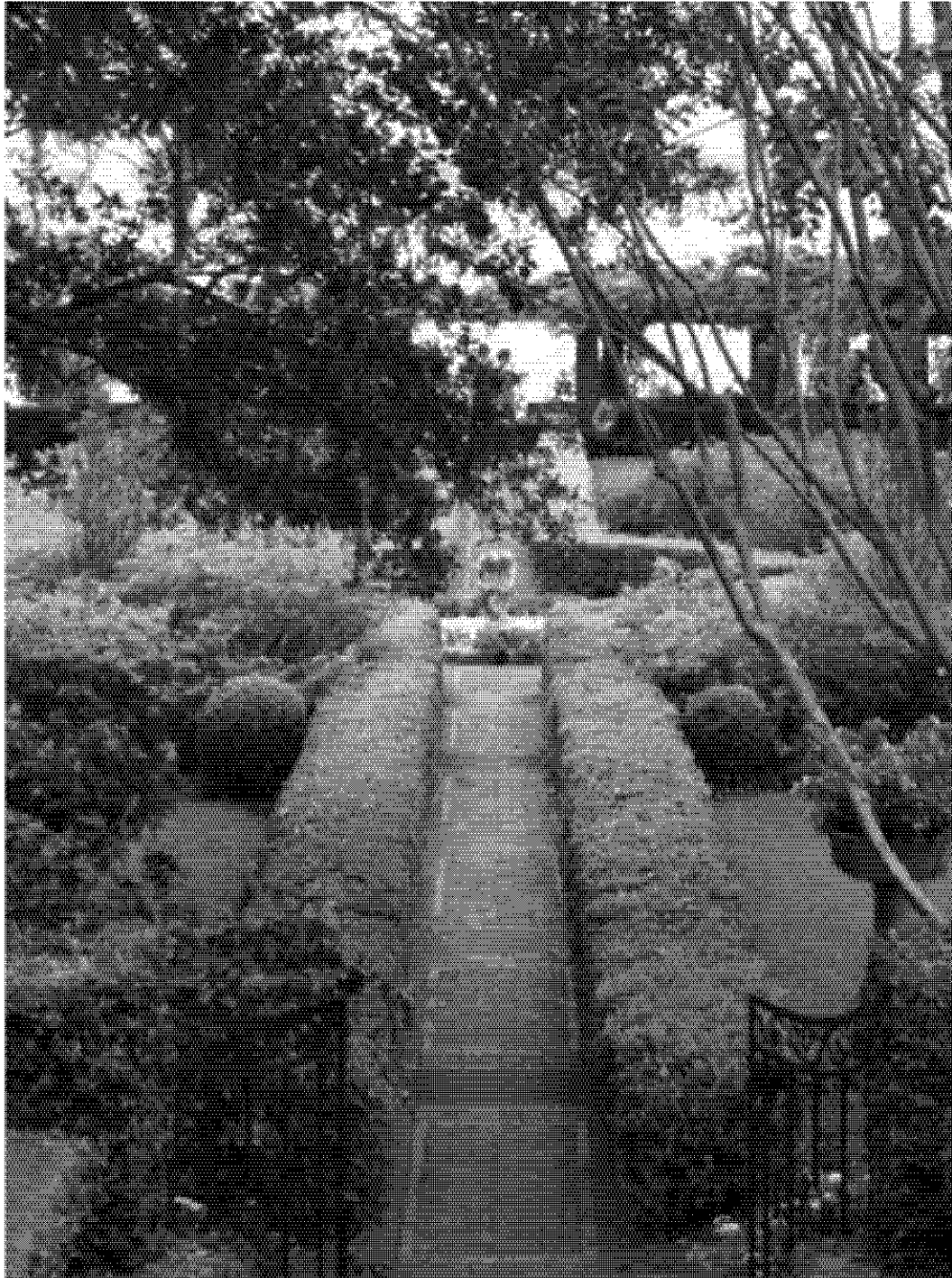
*Brochures*

The Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens - Garden Map (brochure)

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Site plan of the Cummer Gardens from the brochure entitled Museum Map, published by the Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens (Drawing extraction and retouching by Laurie E. Sheldon, October 29, 2009).



The Cummer Museum's English Garden, characterized by its parterres and wisteria arbor, was designed in 1903 by Ossian Cole Simonds, one of the founders of the American Society of Landscape Architects (Laurie Elizabeth Sheldon on October 13, 2009).



Mosaic-inlay fountain located on the south side of the English garden. Made by William R. Mercer, Jr. and purchased by Ninah Cummer circa 1922 (Laurie E. Sheldon, October 13, 2009). A comparison of this image with a historic 1924 photograph in the Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens Archives reveals that, except for the adjacent vegetation, little has changed since the fountain's original installation.



One of two rectilinear reflecting pools. Inspired by a visit to Villa Gamberaia (near Florence, Italy), Mrs. Ninah Cummer retained Ellen Biddle Shipman, the "Dean of American Women Landscape Architects" to design this Italianate Garden in 1931 (Laurie Elizabeth Sheldon, October 13, 2009).



The gloriette in the background, covered in *Ficus pumilla*, serves as a visual frame for both looking out over the river to the city's skyline, and inland, where the composition includes this reproduction of the stone fountain that Ninah Cummer commissioned in Italy in 1931 (Laurie Elizabeth Sheldon, October 13, 2009).